

Figure 1. Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks George Frampton (right), former Acting Associate Director, NPS Natural Resources, Denny Fenn (middle), and Shenandoah Center for Resources Leader Bob Krumenaker at the initial ad hoc working group gathering in October.



REPORT ON THE AD HOC TASK FORCE ON THE FUTURE OF NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

By BOB KRUMENAKER

IN RECENT YEARS, IT HAS SEEMED AS THOUGH NPS natural resource management has received lots of rhetorical support but not much else—the establishment of the NBS took away the momentum we had slowly and painstakingly gathered to strengthen our programs, and then restructuring plans appeared ready to sap us further. So when I read the Assistant Secretary George Frampton memo to the Director last fall approving restructuring only if we strengthened natural resources, I eagerly volunteered to be part of the ad hoc group he was forming to make it happen. This appeared to me to be the best—and possibly only—opportunity we would have for a long while to make major changes in the culture of the agency, to (in Frampton's words) make natural resources "flourish."

The ad hoc group convened in Washington last October, with high expectations. Sixteen of us, plus four assistants who became integral participants, attended. Denny Fenn, then Acting Associate Director for Natural Resources, chaired the panel. We came from parks, regions, the Washington Office, and the NBS. We were resource managers, scientists, park managers, planners, and policy people. Director Kennedy and Assistant Secretary Frampton gave us our charge that Monday morning to:

- Redefine natural resource management in the NBS era
- Suggest changes to the restructuring plan as needed to make natural resource management "flourish"
- Define the role of research in a post-NBS, restructured NPS, and suggest enhancements to the NPS-NBS relationship to help assure that our biological research needs are met, and
- Update the 1992 servicewide natural resources strategic plan

Frampton made it clear that he wanted specifics that could be implemented immediately, not a long and bureaucratic report. His enthusiasm and willingness to upset the status quo were infectious, though I think we were nonplussed by the enormity of the changes we were being asked to recommend and the sheer improbability of this opportunity.

Drafting the report required many rewrites before we were satisfied that we had found the right combination of substance, tone, and length to be most effective. Released in late January, this report:

- Articulates guiding principles for an enhanced natural resource management program

- Outlines a core program of natural resource management services
 - Enhances the visibility of natural resources at the field director level
 - Clarifies the role of the chief scientists in the new organization, and
 - Recommends reengineering a number of natural resource management processes
- More specifically, the ad hoc report recommends:
- Fully supporting, through the budget process, the Stewardship Today for Parks tomorrow goal to double resource management staff by the year 2000 and fully implementing the approved Inventory and Monitoring Program
 - Using incentives to assure that natural resource expertise and considerations are

part of major park decisions

- Increasing natural resource support staff for clusters to at least 11 FTEs (full-time equivalent positions) and establishing a research advisor and natural resource management associate director at each field director office
- Strengthening the highly specialized expertise of the National Natural Resource Center (NNRC—presently the Washington Office Natural Resource Divisions in Colorado)
- Accelerating natural resource professionalization in parks
- Preparing managerially skilled resource managers for career advancement
- Creating a national chief scientist position to act as liaison between us and the NBS, USGS, and other agencies who conduct research on our behalf, and coordinate all remaining natural resource research activities conducted internally
- Providing research liaisons to NBS regional offices through field director office research advisors

Continued on page 15

- Developing a budget initiative to establish NBS field stations within all NPS areas with significant natural resources, and
- Developing methods to ensure that NPS research needs are served by the NBS

By the time our February 15 briefing of the assistant secretary rolled around, the restructuring effort had made it clear that our recommendations would be considered only in light of mandated FTE reductions. Furthermore, we were asked to recommend actions that could be taken now whether or not the natural resource program can flourish. Despite these limitations, the briefing went well, and both the assistant secretary and director agreed in principle with the findings and recommendations of the report. Both also indicated that they want to do something positive for our programs in response.

The ad hoc working group deliberations, the resulting report, and the recent briefing represent a positive step forward for NPS natural resource management in the restructuring effort. Still, we are not sure exactly what will result. A number of additional steps (including March national leadership council consideration of field director offices, system support offices, the National Natural Resource Center, and other central office staffing) must be taken before we will know the ultimate outcome of the ad hoc working group's recommendations. As stated by the assistant secretary, the issue has now been "crystallized" and discussions on this matter are "to be continued."

PS

Bob Krumenaker is the Leader for the Center for Resources at Shenandoah National Park, Virginia, (703) 999-3491.